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The National Women's Health Information Center

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Frequently Asked Questions about Urinary Tract Infections—Easy to Read



"It was a normal day at work, but I was tired and felt like I had to pass urine the whole day. But when I went to the bathroom, not much came out. When I did pass urine, it burned and smelled bad—and looked cloudy too. These problems lasted a few days. So I called my doctor, and she said it sounded like a **Urinary Tract Infection**, or UTI. I went to her office, and she asked me to pass urine into a cup. She tested the urine and told me I had a UTI. She called my drug store and ordered pills for me. I took all of the pills she prescribed, and then the UTI and the symptoms were gone."

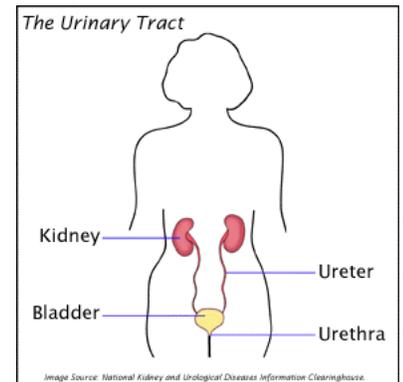
What is a **Urinary (yoor-ih-nehr-ee) Tract Infection (UTI)**?

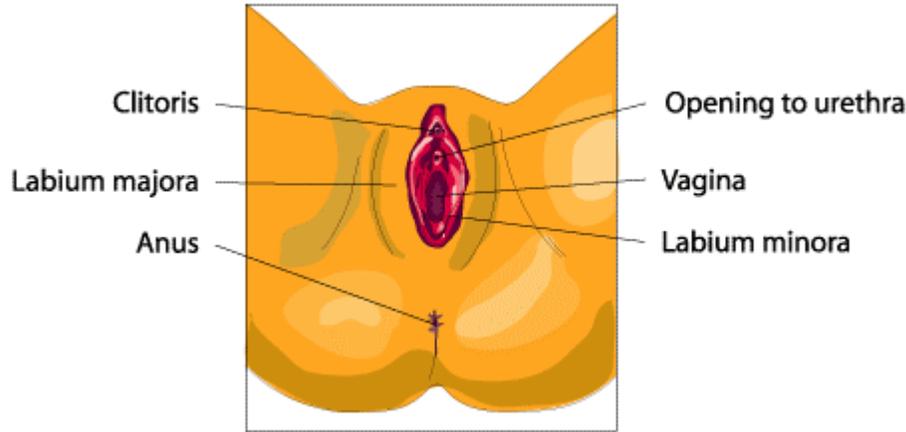
The urinary tract makes and stores urine. Bacteria (bak-teer-ee-uh), a type of germ that gets into your urinary tract, cause a UTI. This infection can happen in parts of your urinary tract, like your kidneys, bladder, or urethra (yuh-ree-thra).

What causes **Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)**?

Many things can help to cause UTIs:

- Wiping from back to front after a bowel movement (BM). Germs can get into your urethra, which has its opening in front of the vagina.
- Having sexual intercourse. Germs in the vagina can be pushed into the urethra.
- Waiting too long to pass urine. When urine stays in the bladder for a long time, more germs are made, and the worse a UTI can become.
- Using a diaphragm for birth control, or spermicides with a diaphragm or on a condom. To read more about diaphragms, go to <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/DIAPHRAGMS.HTM>.
- Anything that makes it hard to completely empty your bladder, like a kidney stone.
- Having diabetes, which makes it harder for your body to fight other health problems.
- Loss of estrogen and changes in the vagina after menopause. Menopause is when you stop getting your period.





What are the signs of a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?

There are signs if you have an infection:

- Pain or stinging when you pass urine.
- An urge to pass urine a lot.
- Pressure in your lower belly.
- Urine that smells bad or looks milky, cloudy, or reddish in color.
- Feeling tired or shaky or having a fever.

How does a doctor find out I have a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?

To find out if you have a UTI, your doctor will ask you to pass urine into a plastic cup. When you open the cup, don't touch the inside of the lid or inside of the cup. Before you pass urine, wipe the area between the labium majora, or outer lips of the vagina, with a special tissue, given to you by your doctor. Then, pass a little bit of urine into the toilet and then into the cup.

How is a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) treated?

UTIs are treated with antibiotics (an-ty-by-ah-tiks), a medicine that kills the infection. Your doctor will tell you how long you need to take the medicine. Make sure you take all of your medicine, even if you feel better!

If you don't take medicine for a UTI, the UTI can hurt other parts of your body. Also, if you're pregnant and have signs of a UTI, see your doctor right away. A UTI could cause problems in your pregnancy, such as having your baby too early or getting high blood pressure.

Are there steps I can take to help prevent a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?

These are steps you can take to try to prevent a UTI. But you may follow these steps and still get a UTI. If you have symptoms of a UTI, call your doctor.

- Urinate when you need to. Don't hold it. Pass urine before and after sex. After you pass urine or have a bowel movement (BM), wipe from front to back.
- Drink water every day and after sex.
- Clean the outer lips of your vagina and anus each day. The anus is the place where a bowel movement leaves your body, located between the buttocks.
- Don't use douches or feminine hygiene sprays.
- If you get a lot of UTIs and use spermicides, or creams that kill sperm, talk to your doctor about using other forms of birth control.
- Wear underwear with a cotton crotch.

For more information...

For more information about urinary tract infections, contact the National Women's Health Information Center at (800) 994-WOMAN (9662) or TDD at 1-888-220-5446. Visit NWHIC's web site at www.4woman.gov.

National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse

Phone Number(s): (800) 891-5390

Internet Address: <http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/>

American Foundation for Urologic Disease

Phone Number(s): (800) 242-2383

Internet Address: <http://www.afud.org/>

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Resource Center

Phone Number(s): (202) 638-5577 Resource Center

Internet Address: <http://www.acog.org/>

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The Urinary Tract Infection FAQ was reviewed by Dr. Leroy Nyberg, Dr. Josie Briggs, and Kathy Kranzfelder at the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases.

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